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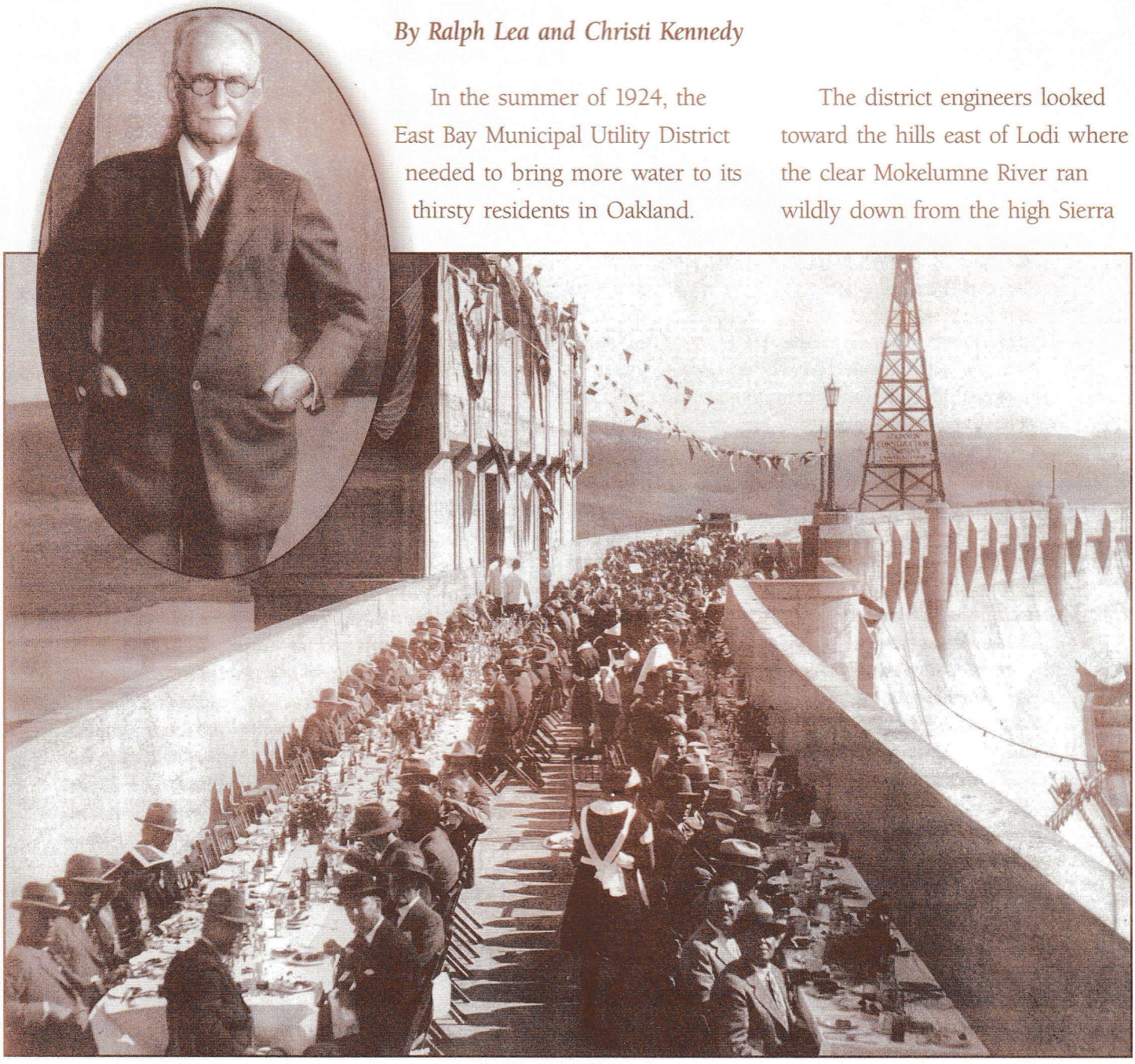
PARDEE DAM DESPITE LEGAL TANGLES

By Ralph Lea and Christi Kennedy

In the summer of 1924, the East Bay Municipal Utility District needed to bring more water to its thirsty residents in Oakland.

The district engineers looked toward the hills east of Lodi where the clear Mokelumne River ran wildly down from the high Sierra



▲ *The Dedication Luncheon held at Pardee Dam, October 19, 1929. Inset: Dr. George C. Pardee, Governor of California 1903-1907. He served as President of the East Bay Utility District Board of Directors, 1924 to 1941.*

Nevada snowfields into the fertile valley. The Mokelumne River and its tributaries formed a watershed that drained 575 square miles of Calaveras, Amador and Alpine counties in the mountains. Near the old gold mining town of Lancha Plana, the Mokelumne River dove through a mile-long chute in a rocky gorge. Engineers thought this was a suitable spot to build a dam to store water for the East Bay.

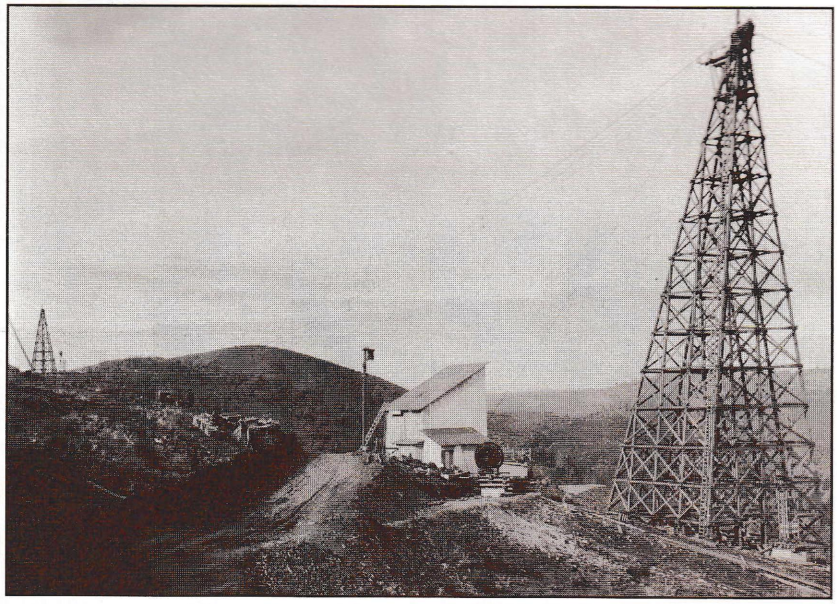
▲ *Lancha Plana (Pardee Dam) Site, July 1927.*

Once the site was chosen, EBMUD had to get voter approval to fund a dam. The $34 million bond issue was approved with a vote of 81,919 to 31,998 on Nov. 4, 1924. Also with that election, Dr. George C. Pardee was elected to the EBMUD board and subsequently named president. A. P. Davis was named project engineer for the dam.

Over the next several months, the dam and aqueduct to deliver the water to the East Bay was designed. The dam was to be 358 feet high, and the aqueduct was 94 miles long. Bids opened on

▲ *Pardee Dam Site, Mokelumne Gold Dredger Spoils.*

▲ *1927; Anchoring the Lancha Plana (Pardee) Dam into the bedrock of the Mokelumne River.*



▲ *Pardee Dam, Mokelumne Project, Valley Springs, CA; Atkinson Construction Co. Contractors.*

build the aqueduct and 42 months to build the dam.

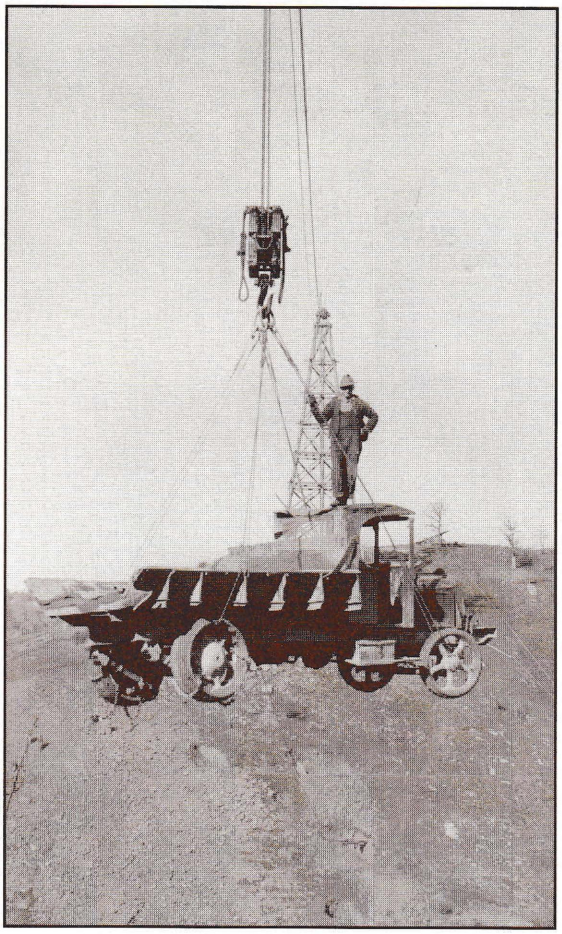
With the design completed, EBMUD had to finish acquiring title to all the land the reservoir would cover and a 100-foot-wide right of way for the aqueduct. This is when things got mired in lawsuits, and construction was delayed.

By the end of 1926, more than 86 miles of the aqueduct's right of way was obtained. But EBMUD's ownership of the land to be covered with water was blocked by Stephen Kieffer of Berkeley. Kieffer had taken up options on nearly 8,000 acres in the heart of the reservoir site. He demanded $2,000 per acre and refused all of EBMUD's settlement offers.

With land ownership in dispute, Lynn S. Atkinson, the dam contractor, couldn't build the dam, but he did preparation work for the project. He set up a large mixing plant and storage bins for rock and cement. Workers removed and burned trees, stumps and brush. The north canyon wall had too much clay, so the dam site had to be moved downstream. This spot required the dam to be higher and increased the cost.

Meanwhile, the legal battle between Kieffer and EBMUD continued in Jackson. Kieffer demanded $18 million for his land and water rights, but on June 29, 1927, an Amador County jury awarded him only $337,450.

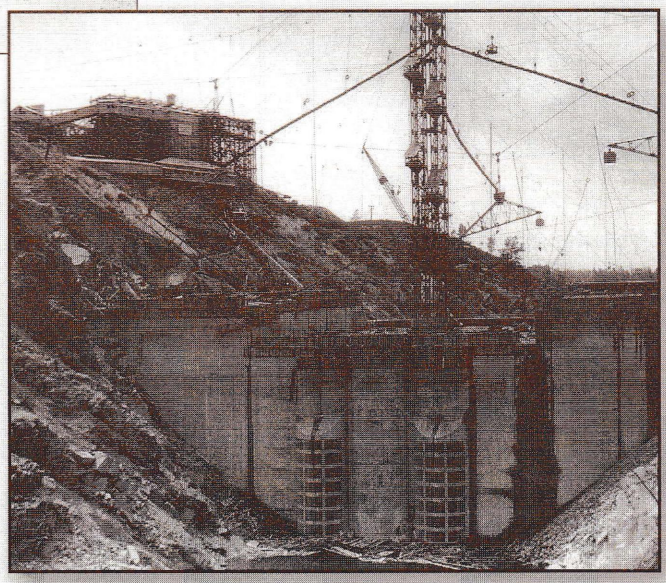
Sept. 4, 1925 and were within $39 million. It was expected to take 30 months to



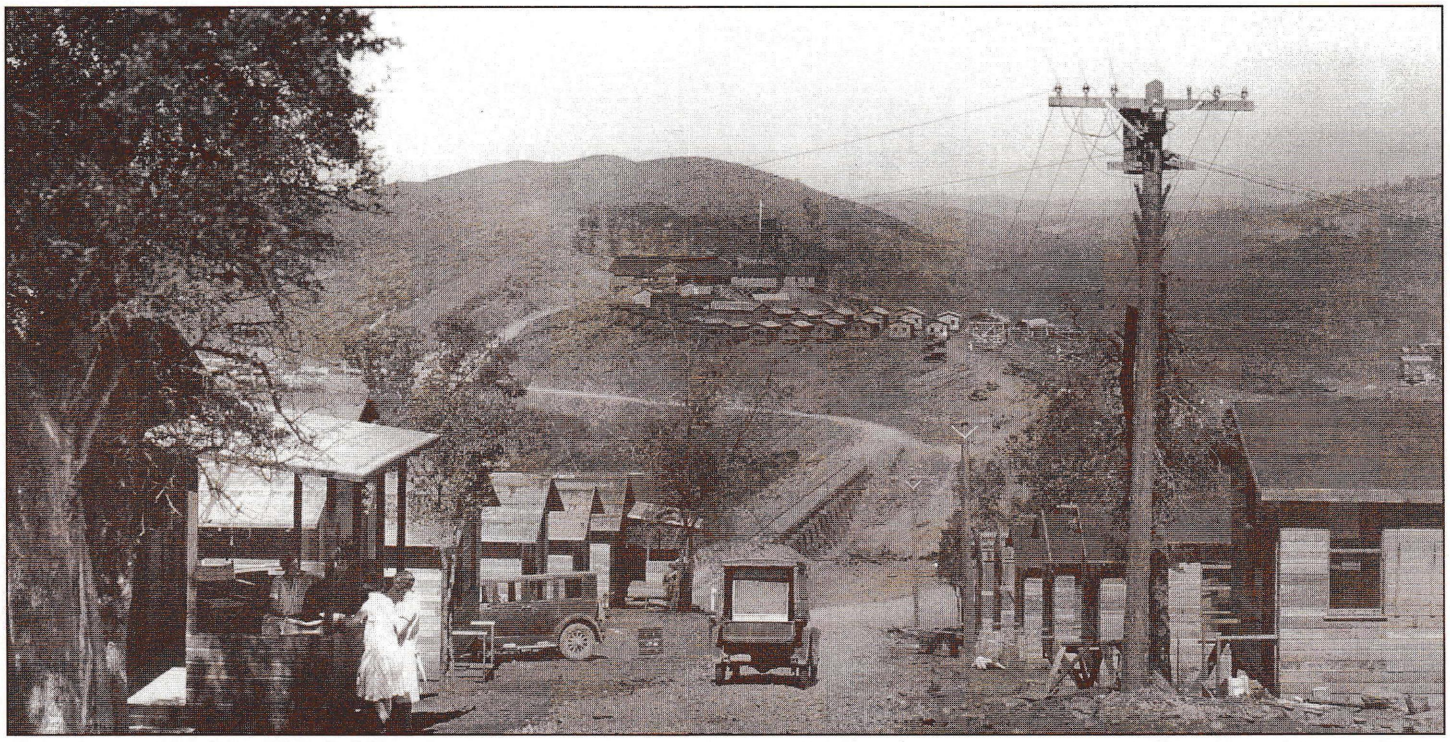
▲ *Lowering truck and driver; Safety Inspectors were absent on photo day!*

▲ *July 31, 1928; Pardee Dam site entrance, Atkinson Construction Co.*

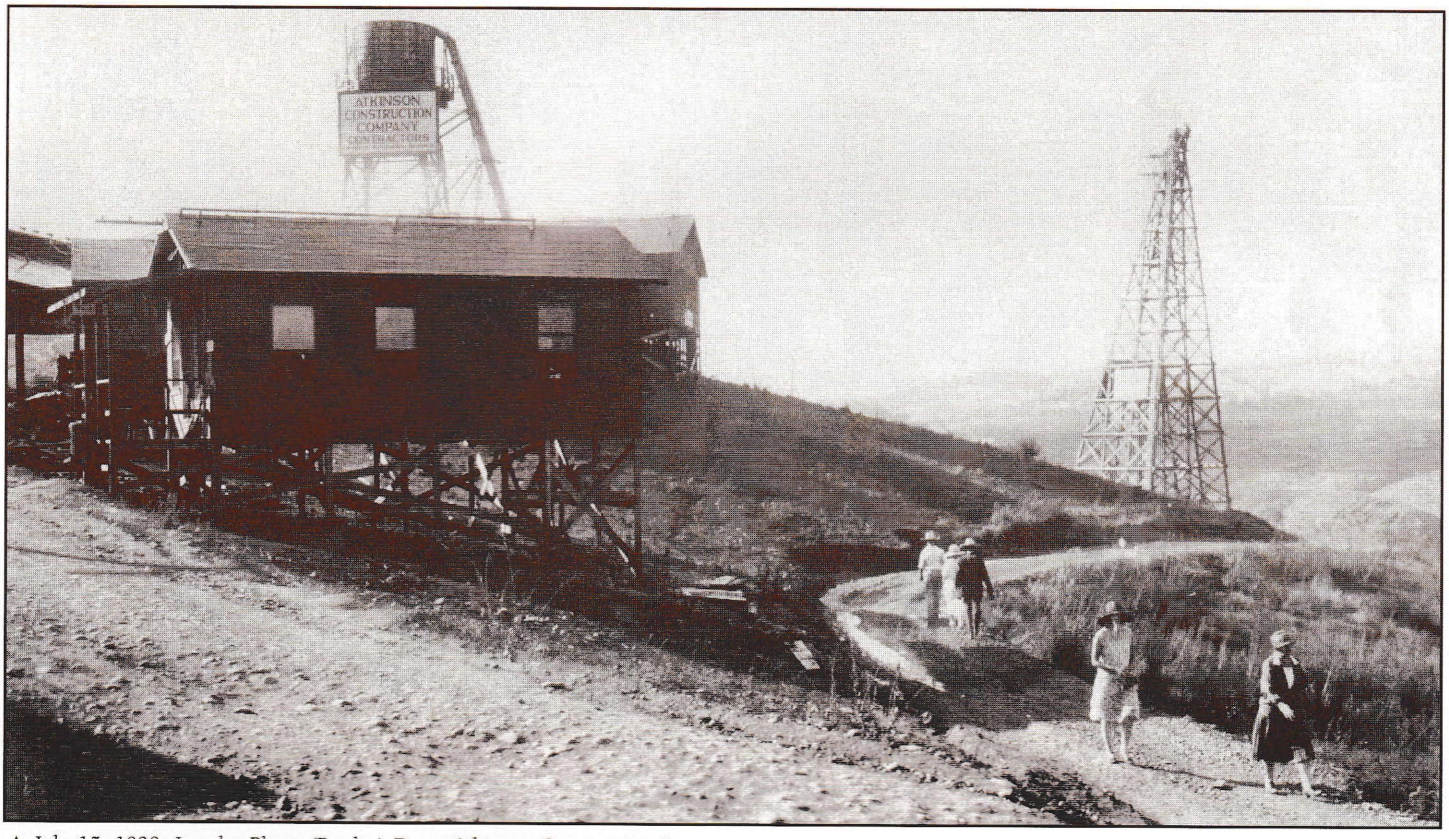
With that court proceeding resolved, dam construction began in earnest. Soon, two locomotives on the spur railroad from Valley Springs were hauling freight to the damsite. Four miles downstream, a rock crushing plant went to work on the old gravel piles left by the gold dredgers. The cleaned and washed aggregate was loaded in skips and moved on an overhead cable tramway to the damsite. The dry cement from the Calaveras plant was shipped by railroad. In December 1927, the first concrete was poured at the Lancha Plana Dam, later called the Pardee Dam after the man who served as an EBMUD president and California governor from 1903-1907. Pardee, his wife and two daughters were frequent visitors at the dam and rode around the dusty roads in EBMUD's seven passenger Lincoln car.



▲ *Pardee Dam, note the mixing plant in upper left.*



▲ *Pardee Dam, camp and workers' quarters.*



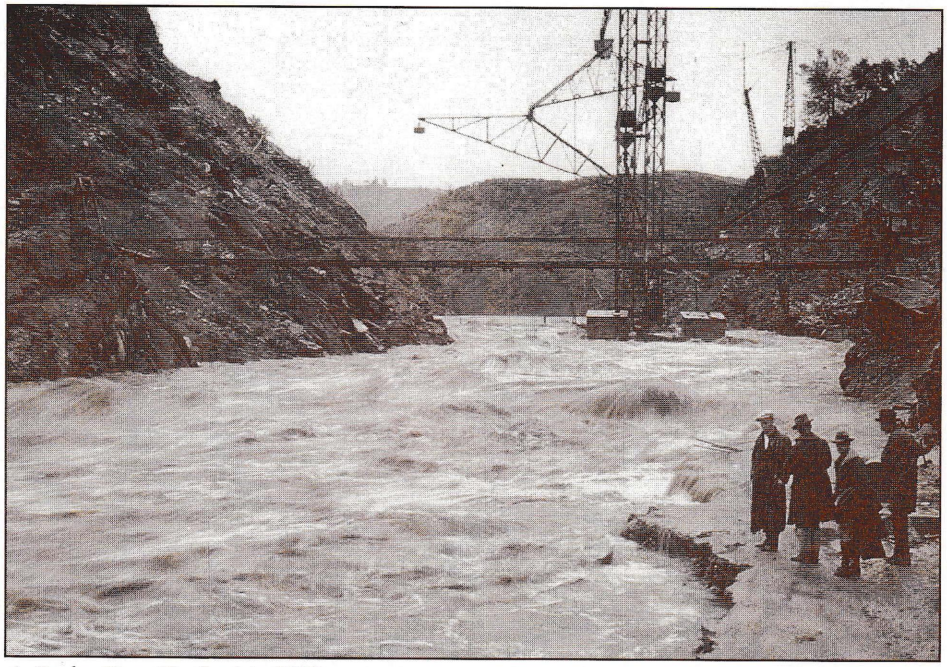
▲ *July 15, 1928; Lancha Plana (Pardee) Dam, Atkinson Construction Co.*

At the peak of construction, some 1,500 men worked on the dam. It was hot, dangerous work. While off duty, the single men relaxed in nearby Campo Seco where Chinese gamblers and women of questionable background set up shop in the town's crumbling adobe buildings.

While construction continued, EBMUD's legal staff was constantly at work on claims for personal injury, damage to crops, springs, wells, roads and bridges.

At this point, the City of Lodi got involved in the huge project on the river running past its northern boundaries. Lodi opened the new year of 1929 by filing a lawsuit to prevent EBMUD from taking Mokelumne River water from the nearly completed reservoir. As lawyers once again argued their cases, the Jackson Creek and South spillways of the dam were completed. In March 1929, storage in Pardee reservoir began.

On Oct. 19, 1929, 10 days before the famous Stock Market crash that sent the nation into the



▲ *Pardee Dam Site flood in 1928.*

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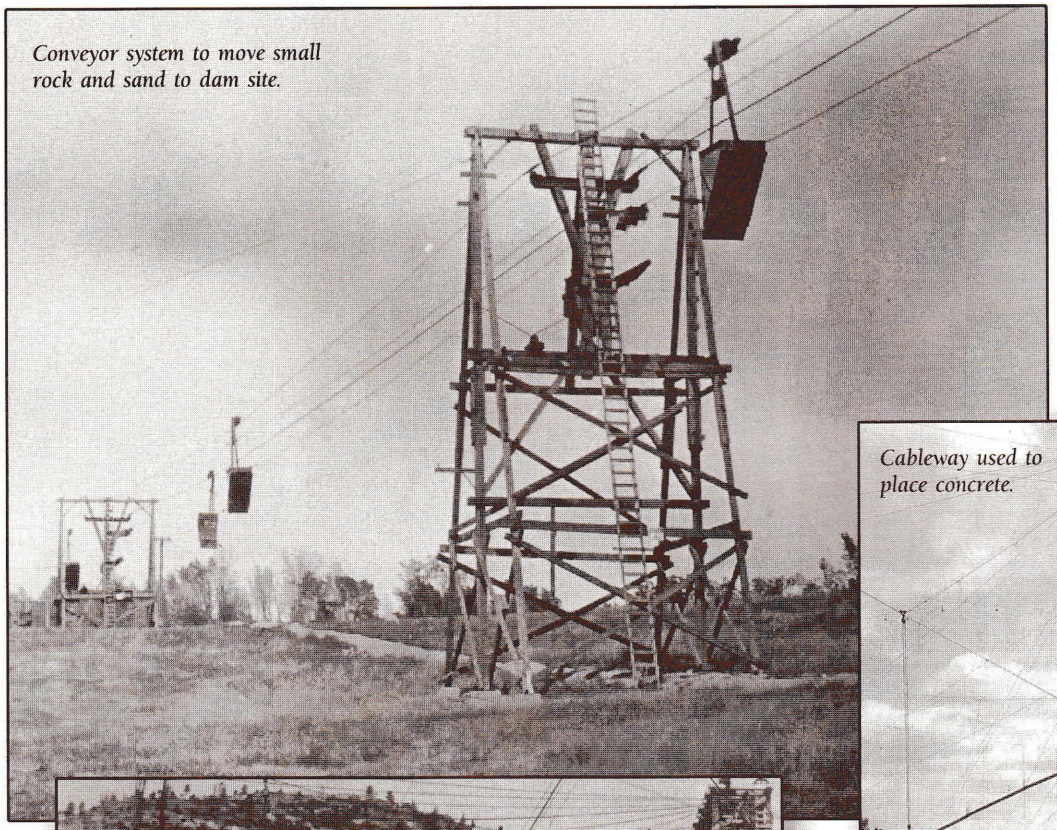
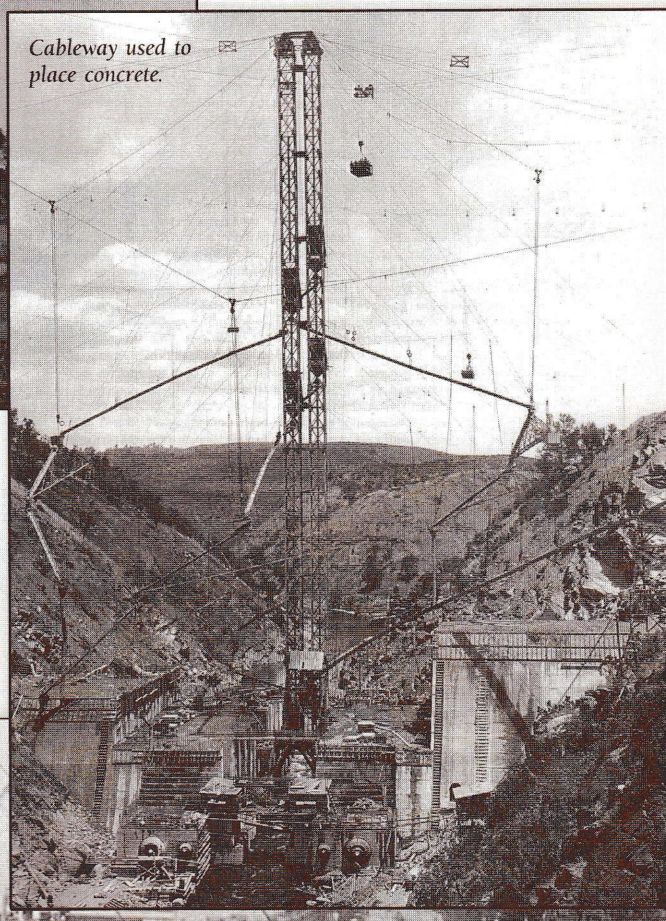
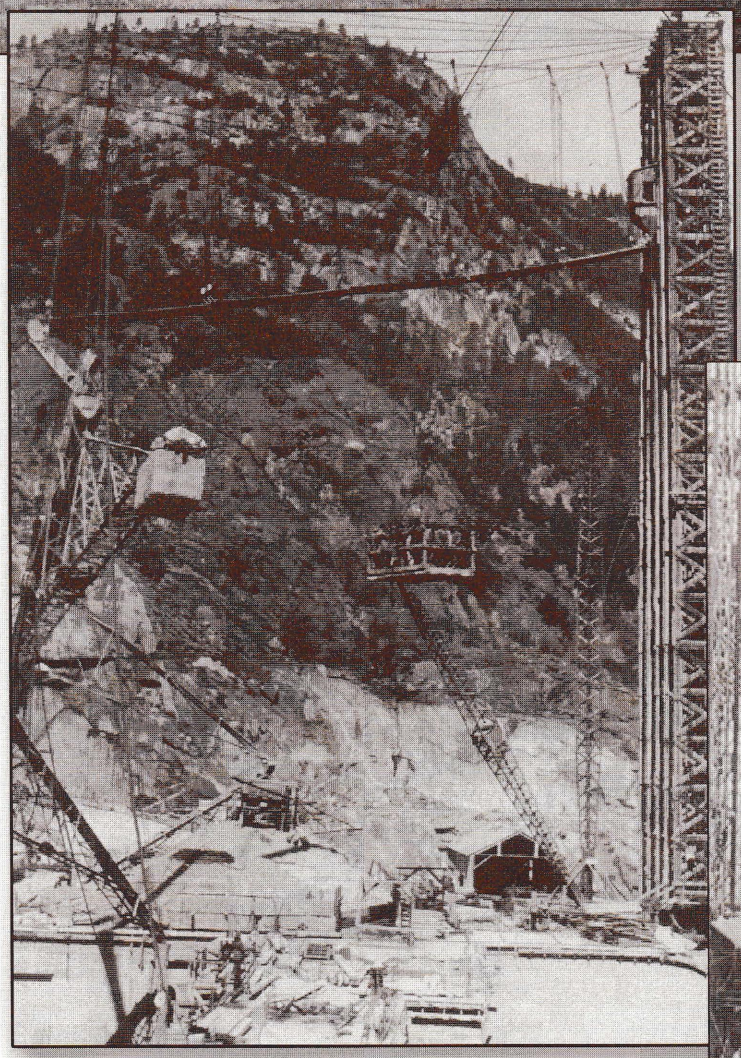


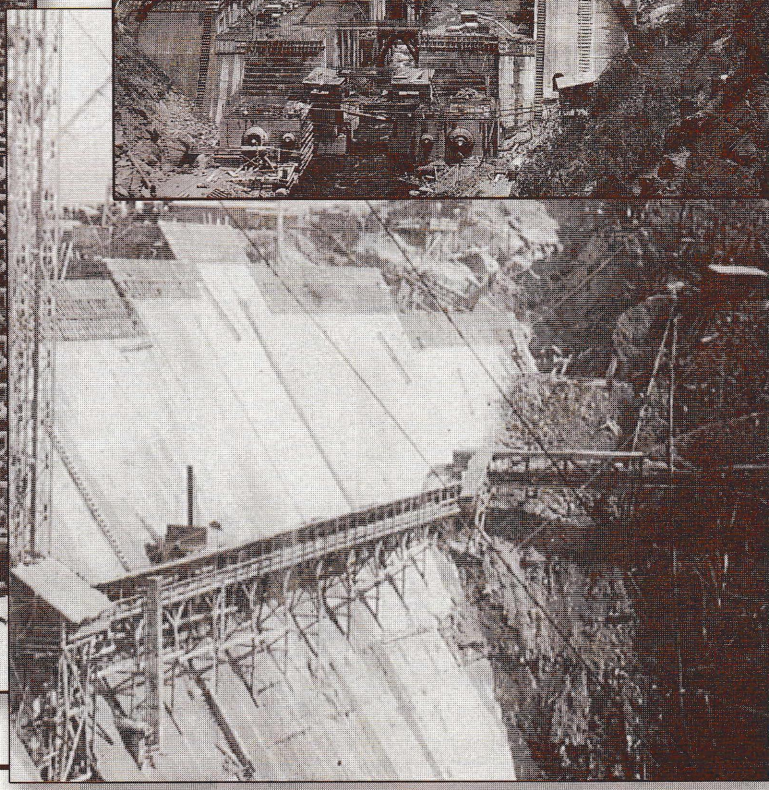
Conveyor system to move small rock and sand to dam site.



Cableway used to place concrete.



Large cranes at work.



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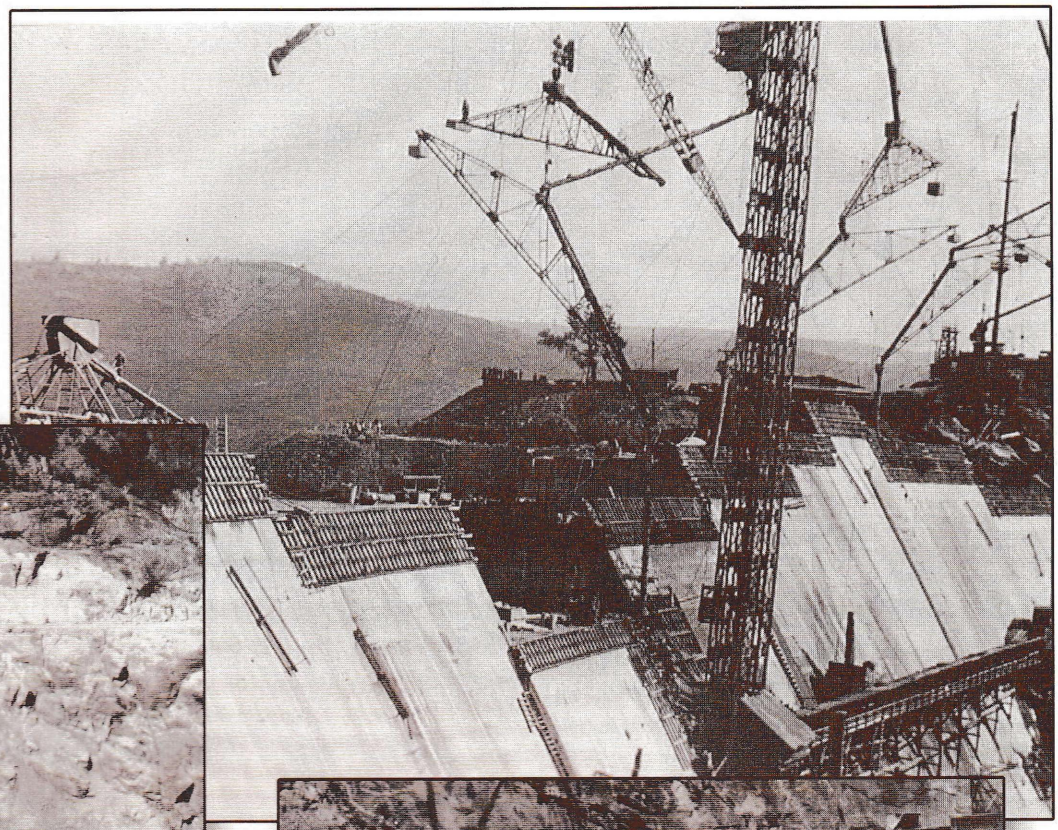
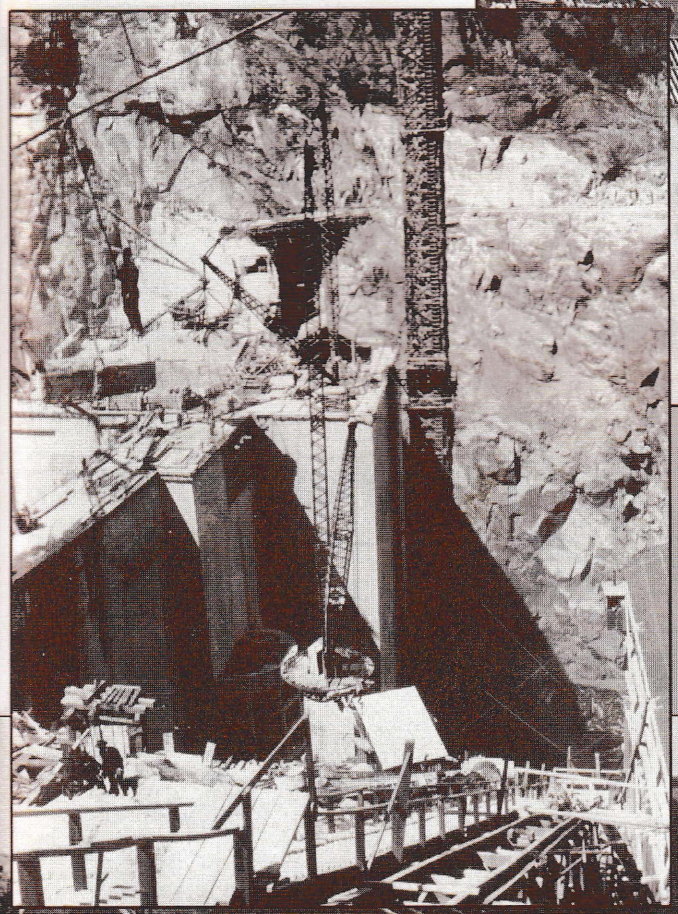
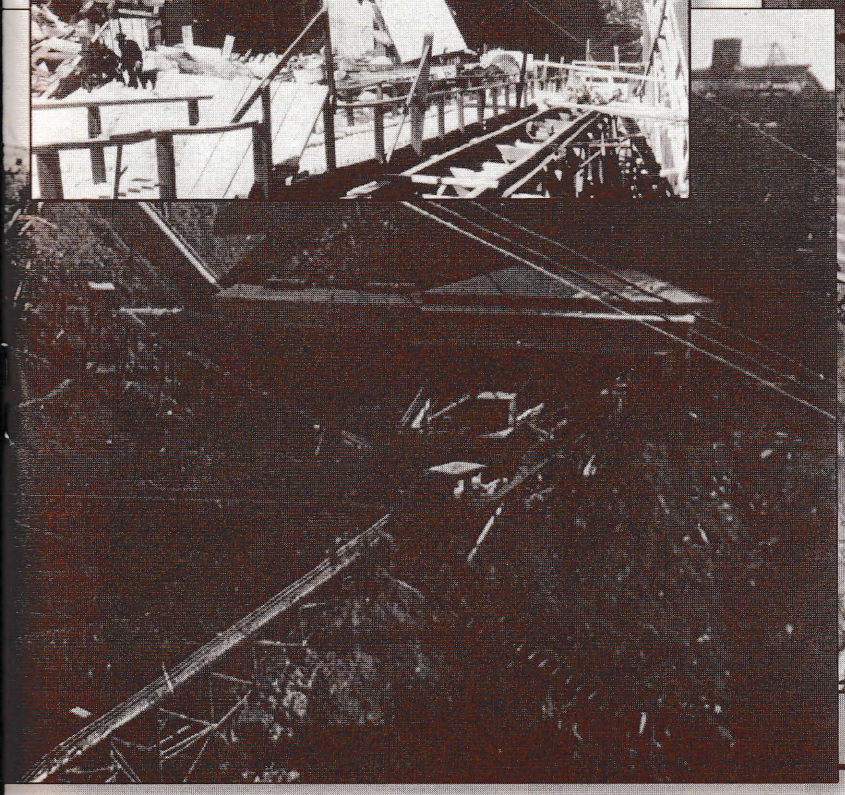
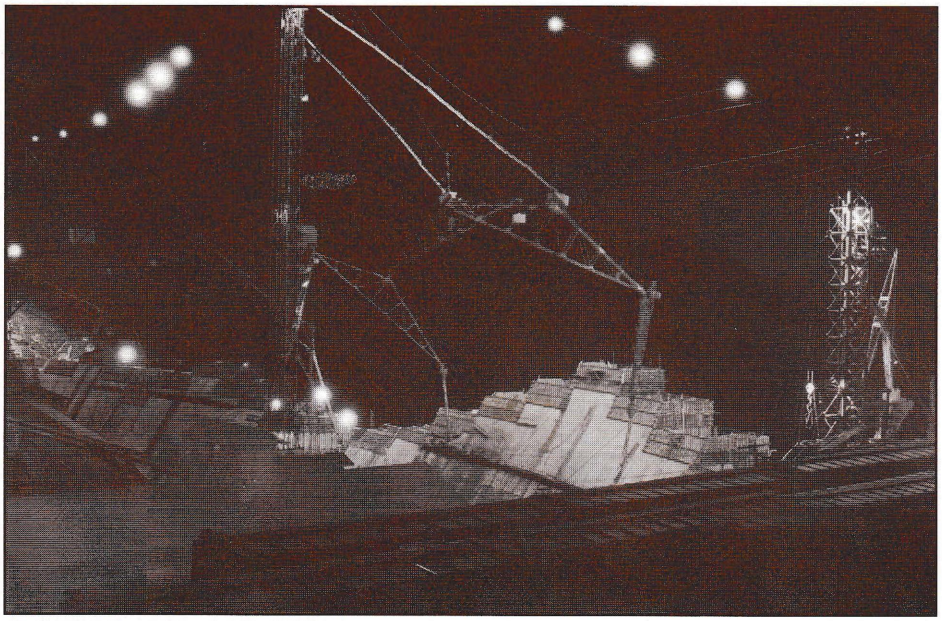






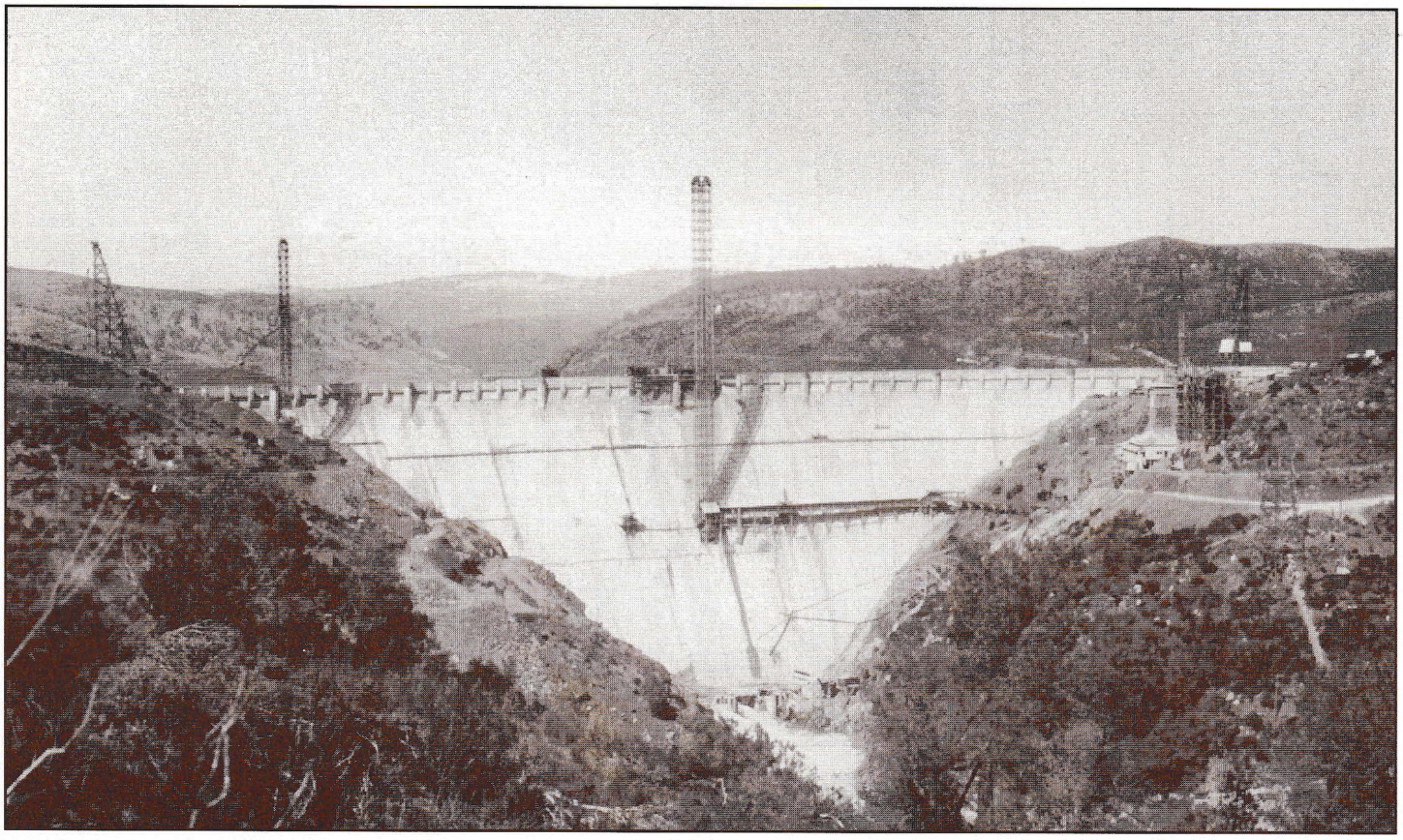


▲ *Pardee Dam, March 31, 1929.*

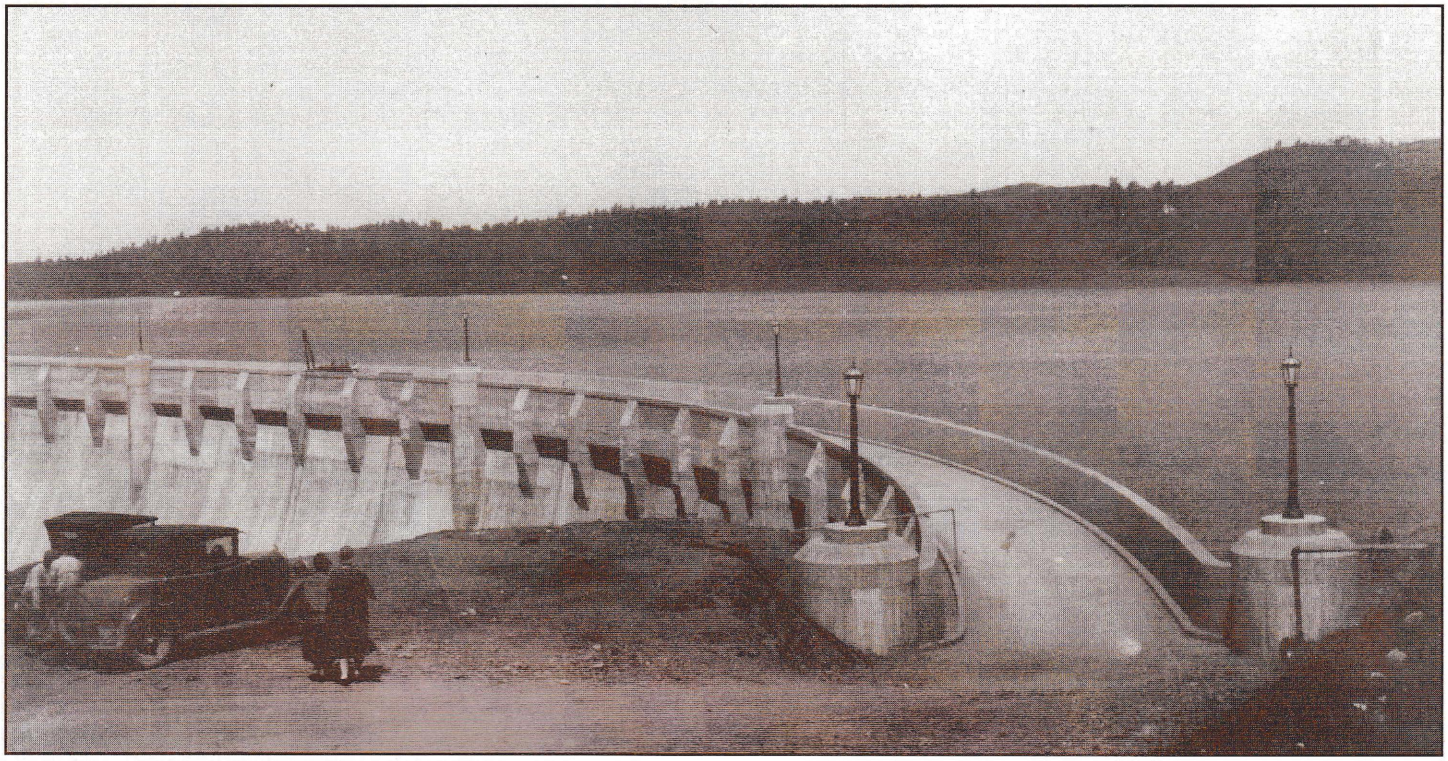
Great Depression, EBMUD held a luncheon on top of the dam to formally dedicate the huge water project. Governor C. C. Young personally dedicated a plaque that day to honor the engineers who designed and constructed the impressive dam.

The Pardee reservoir filled for the first time on May 1, 1930 with melted snow pouring over the spillway. The powerhouse at the dam, the last unit to be completed, went into operation July 4, 1930. EBMUD sold the power it produced to P. G. & E. and then bought it back where needed to save the cost of building its own power lines.

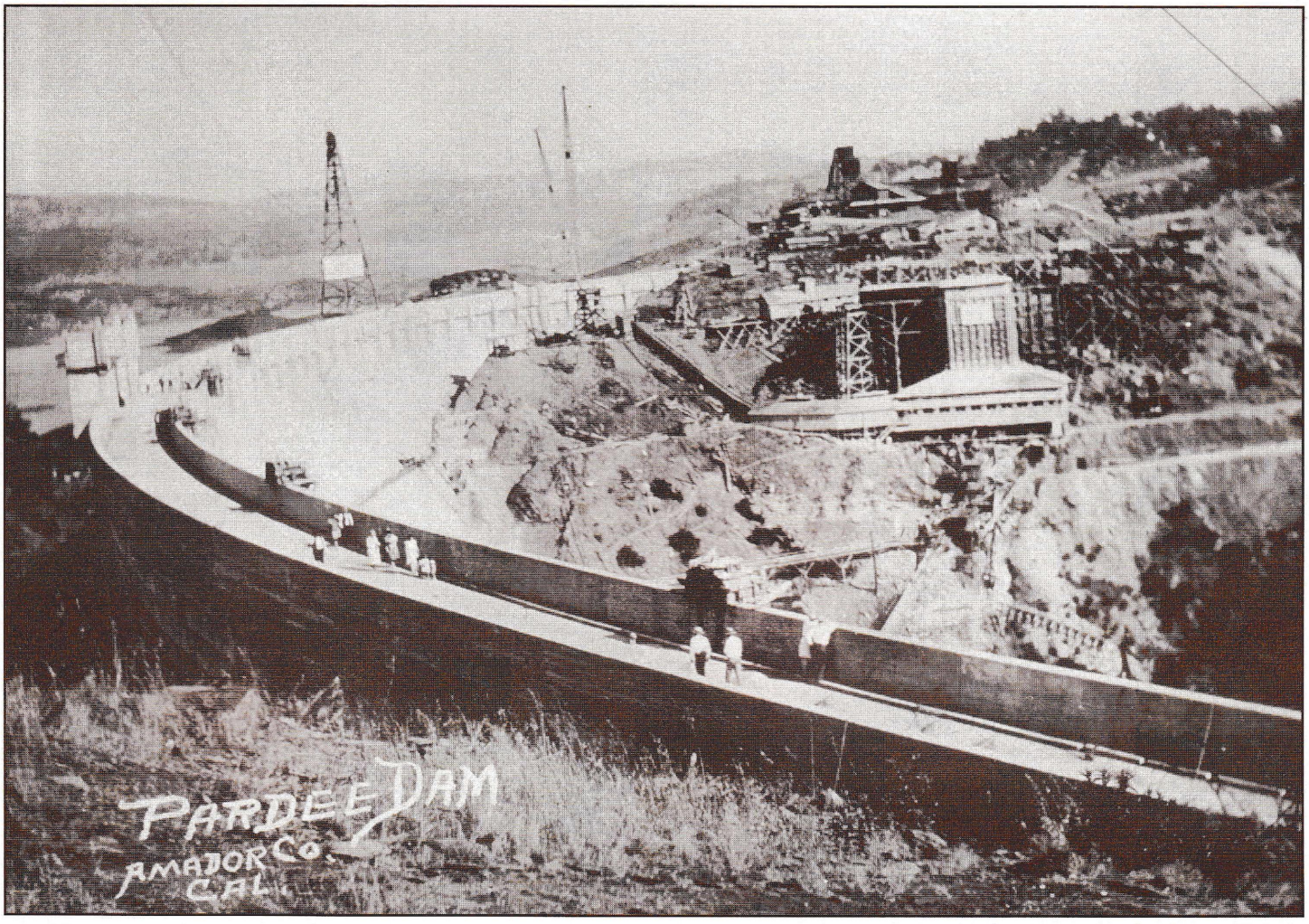
Lodi continued to fight EBMUD in the courts. The City of Lodi, dependent on well water, was concerned that the EBMUD diversion of upstream Mokelumne River waters would deplete its underground sources of water. The city demanded that EBMUD be required to discharge quantities of water to replenish the under-



▲ *Pardee Dam, 1930.*

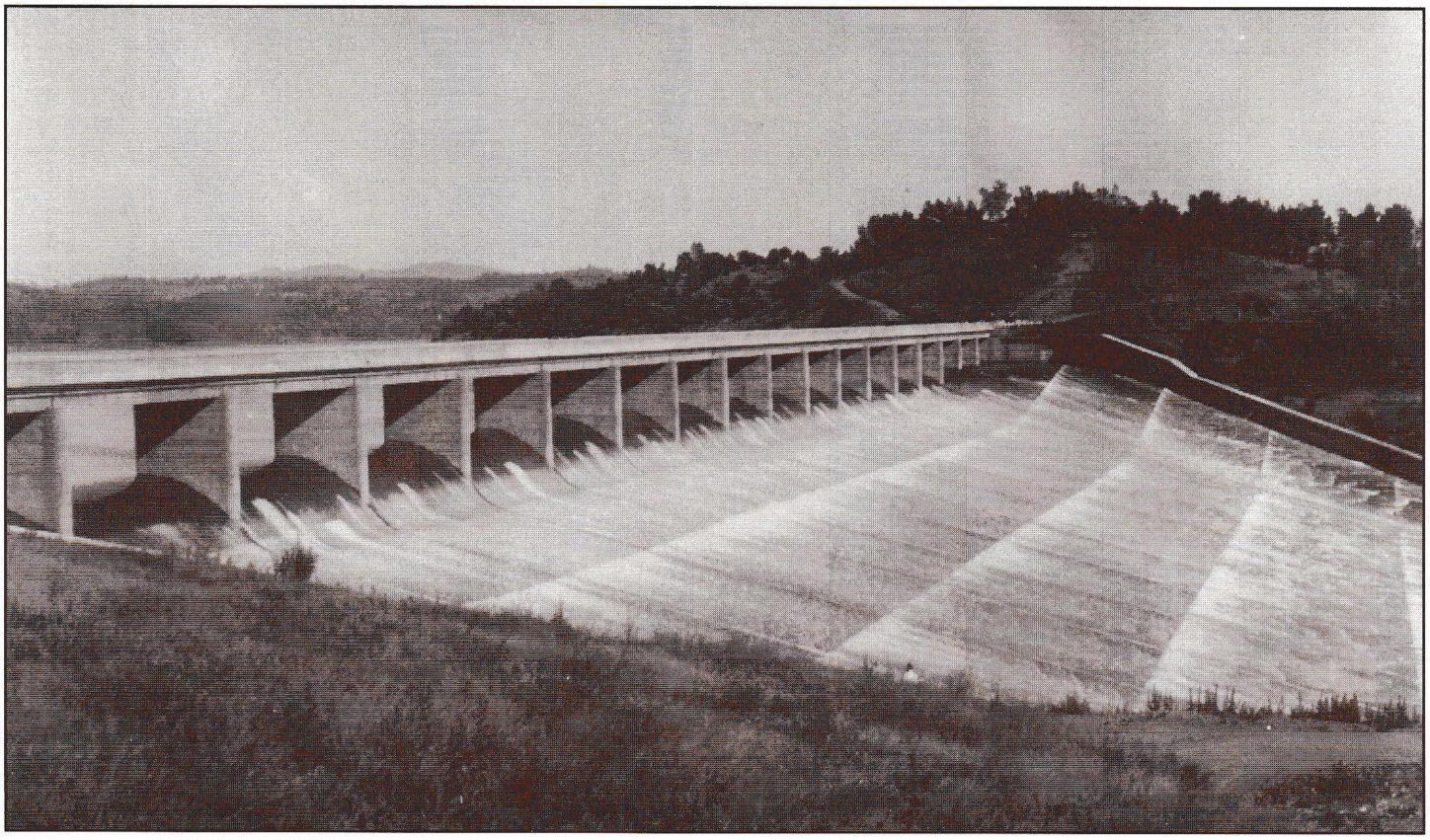


▲ *Pardee Dam, April 7, 1930.*



Pardee Dam in Amador County, 1930. ▲

▲ *Pardee Dam picnic grounds, featuring the "Tombstone" rocks.*



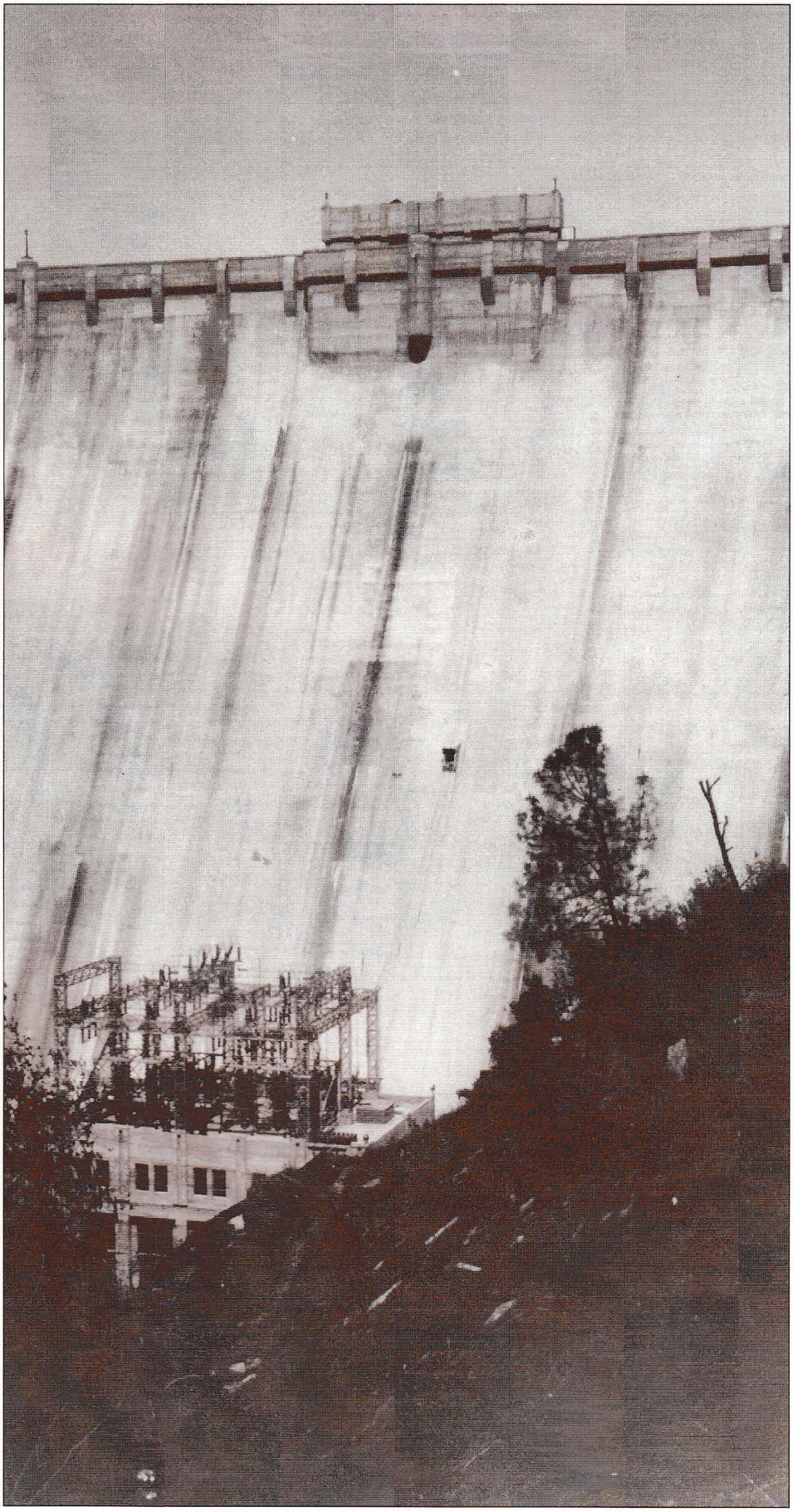
▲ *Pardee Dam Spillway in operation, May 25, 1930.*

ground water table. This was a very emotional issue in Lodi, and feelings toward EBMUD were hard.

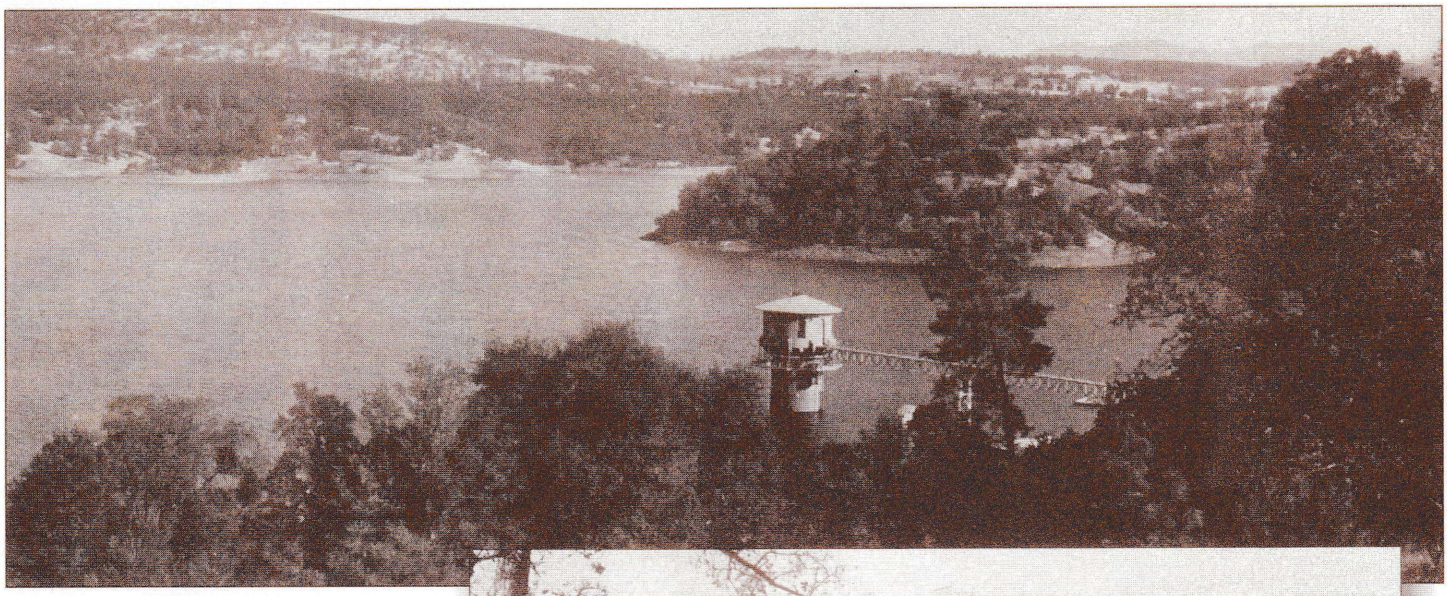
At this time, hydrographer Francis B. Blanchard came to Lodi to compile data for the trial. While here in Lodi, Blanchard met and fell in love with a young Lodi Union High School teacher. They announced their engagement, and within 24 hours, other school faculty members refused to speak to her because she was marrying a EBMUD representative.

In mid-1933, the San Joaquin County Superior Court ruled that EBMUD had to release substantial amounts of water to replenish the underground supply. EBMUD appealed the decision. The state Supreme Court ruled that the lower court had to be reasonable and determine what depth Lodi's well level could drop before jeopardizing its water supply. In order to avoid a retrial, a negotiated settlement was approved March 14, 1938. The agreement was that if Lodi's water level dropped and remained below sea level, EBMUD would supply Lodi with water.

In time, Lodi's hostile feelings toward EBMUD mellowed because its worst fears never materialized. The fine work of Blanchard, district water engineer Frank Watson and later Bill Lange also improved relations between Lodians and the big city water district.



▲ *Pardee Dam power plant, 1931.*



▲ *Pardee Dam, 1948.*

▲ *Erma and Amos P. Reese at the Pardee Dam picnic area observation tower, 1948.*

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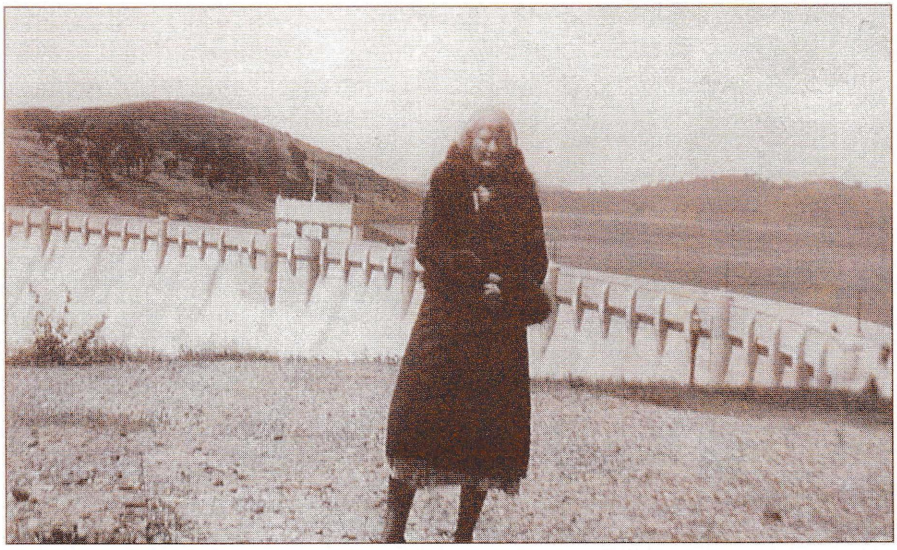

▲ *Pardee Dam, circa 1933.* *Hieb Photo*